

how we can cement our economic recovery and create the jobs of the future. President Biden's Build Back Better agenda—a big, bold investment in infrastructure and jobs—is extremely important to that effort. It has wide support among Democrats and wide support among the American people. Many, many Republicans out there in the country support this bill and this concept. The water infrastructure bill is a small but important part of that overall effort.

We hope our Republican colleagues join us in advancing these proposals to repair and reimagine our Nation's infrastructure for a new century. Just like the anti-Asian hate crimes bill, if Republicans let us get on the bill, we can work out a process to have bipartisan debate and amendments, but if the Republican minority prevents the Senate from even debating some of these commonsense proposals, we will have to try to move forward without them.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, yesterday President Biden announced that American forces will come home from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021. It has been 20 years since that fateful day when the Towers fell and the Pentagon was hit. We in New York live particularly hard with that. I still think of the people I knew who perished: a guy I played basketball with in high school; a businessman who helped me on the way up; a brave firefighter who used to go around the city urging people to donate blood together. But in that time since then, America's Armed Forces, thank God, have become extremely successful in deterring and rooting out terrorist networks around the globe.

President Obama authorized the mission that took out Osama bin Laden, the architect of the 9/11 attacks. Our intelligence agencies have assessed that al-Qaida and other terrorist groups do not pose an immediate threat to strike the United States from Afghanistan because of the brave work of our Armed Forces and intelligence organizations. So after sinking two decades of blood and treasure into wars in the Middle East, it is time to bring our troops home. America does not need to fight forever wars.

I applaud President Biden's decision. Unlike President Trump, President Biden and Secretary Austin have developed a careful and thought-out plan. This isn't President Trump waking up one morning and announcing a random new policy on Twitter while our generals scramble to catch up. This will be a careful and thought-out plan with a real timetable and a firm end date.

Whenever we talk about American troops in the Middle East, one of the concerns is missions creep and the enormous pressure to kick the can down the road and delay final decisions. We should and must stick to the date the President has proposed as the

last day our troops will be there. I have been assured by the White House that the September 11 date will stick and that President Biden will not kick the can down the road.

I know many Senators have questions, so I am happy to let my colleagues know that the administration has agreed to brief all Senators on this important decision. The briefing will take place soon. It will be in the SCIF, and everyone's questions can be asked and answered. The President himself will address the Nation later today and explain the reasons for his decision.

In my view, President Biden's plan to bring American troops home from Afghanistan is a very wise one.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, "Biden takes the easy way out of Afghanistan. The likely result is disaster." This is the morning's lead editorial from one of the Nation's most liberal newspapers.

The administration has decided to abandon U.S. efforts in Afghanistan, which have helped keep radical Islamic terrorism in check, and bizarrely, they decided to do so by September 11. Apparently, we are to help our adversaries ring in the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks by giftwrapping the country and handing it right back to them.

Here is what this administration's own national intelligence threat assessment says will happen:

The Taliban is likely to make gains on the battlefield, and the Afghan government will struggle to hold the Taliban at bay if the coalition withdraws support.

This is a quote from this administration.

In 2019, the Democratic leader and the now chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee expressed outrage that the previous administration considered hosting Taliban officials for discussions around the date of September 11.

But now a Democratic administration is going to skip the negotiations and just surrender an entire country back to the Taliban on the very same date? Our President should remember what happened when the Obama administration let political considerations rush a retreat from Iraq—total chaos and bloodshed and ISIS.

Two years ago, I wrote a bipartisan amendment that warned a Republican administration against recklessly withdrawing from Afghanistan or Syria. A supermajority of Senators right here voted for it. A supermajority of Senators voted for it, warning that the terrorist threat had not abated. Where are the Democratic voices today? I hope we will hear from some of them.

Unfortunately, this mistake in Afghanistan is one of several instances of this new administration's surrendering leverage without making America, our allies, or our interests more secure.

In January, President Biden extended the New START agreement with Russia by Executive order for 5 years—no strings attached, no concessions secured, not even a shorter term extension to keep up pressure on Russia to cooperate on a better agreement. Just a gift—a gift.

And then there is Iran. Senior administration officials have gone from denigrating the former administration's "maximum pressure" strategy to simply begging for direct talks with Iran, to proactively offering to remove sanctions that are "inconsistent with the JCPOA." So which sanctions exactly are inconsistent with the JCPOA? Our sanctions on Iran's terrorist organizations or its ballistic missile program?

Most Republicans would be thrilled if President Biden could actually secure a better deal that holds Iran accountable. Giving up the leverage of sanctions before we even get to the table—before we even get to the table—or just return to a bad deal is certainly not a good sign.

It would be hard to support any deal that isn't part of a broader strategy that also confronts the nonnuclear threats Iran poses to America and to the region.

On China, the administration's tough talk has been welcome, but its proposal to cut defense spending after inflation suggests there is less interest in walking the walk. We will not keep pace with China and Russia by cutting defense spending to placate fringe parts of the far left.

The American people need and they deserve a foreign policy that puts our security, our partners, and our interests ahead of the reflexive desire to break with the last 4 years at any cost—at any cost.

If this administration wants a successful legacy on the world stage, if they want accomplishments that will endure, they need to put American strength back at the center and come back to a bipartisan mainstream.

THE FOR THE PEOPLE ACT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Now, Mr. President, on a completely different matter, we know Democrats are desperate to create a national controversy over voting regulations, but the facts and the truth keep getting in the way.

For more than a year, we have seen a coordinated campaign to call any

American institution that occasionally frustrates liberal activists an evil relic of Jim Crow. Let me say that again. For more than a year, we have seen a coordinated campaign to call any American institution that occasionally frustrates liberal activists an evil relic of Jim Crow.

When these talking points came into circulation last summer, their focus was the legislative filibuster here in the Senate, except it was Senate Democrats who had just used the legislative filibuster to kill Senator TIM SCOTT's police reform, body camera, and anti-lynching legislation.

Two days ago, our colleague the assistant Democratic leader suggested he now opposes the filibuster because it was used back in the 1920s to block an anti-lynching bill. To be clear, our colleague from Illinois was a loud and proud defender of the current Senate rules as recently as 2018. This isn't about the 1920s. It is not about the 1920s. It is about Democrats wanting different sets of rules, depending on whether or not they happen to be in the majority.

Our colleague didn't need to go back nine decades to find instances of Democrats' filibustering a Republican anti-lynching bill. He only needed to go back 9 months. He didn't have to go back to the 1920s but just go back 9 months to find an example of Democrats filibustering an anti-lynching bill.

Last summer, 44 Senate Democrats locked arms and filibustered TIM SCOTT's police reform, body camera, and anti-lynching legislation because it was not far left enough or anti-police enough. That is the irony here. If any recent Senate filibusters have been reminiscent of the 1920s, it was when Democrats killed a Republican anti-lynching bill just last summer.

Here is the truth. Our colleagues can't defend any of the details of their radical policies. So they want to change the subject—change the subject—by any means necessary.

Look at voting regulations. The recent bill passed in the State of Georgia mandates more days of early voting than plenty of Democratic-run States allow. It continues no-excuse absentee voting, which some blue States do not allow. There is no factual standard by which its overall approach is radically more restrictive than the rules in place in many other States, blue or red.

The Washington Post has given the White House its worst rating, four—four Pinocchios—for repeated lies about Georgia and the election law. But the President and his staff just keep on doubling down.

One of our colleagues who represents Georgia put his name to a public statement—to a public statement—with inaccurate information about the bill.

In the Rules Committee, the Democratic leader shouted angry attacks at things the Georgia law simply doesn't do.

Why the fake narratives? Why the falsehoods? We all know why. For more

than 2 years, Washington Democrats have been desperate to pass a sweeping partisan takeover of our democracy. It is packed—packed—with shameful provisions that have nothing to do with ballot access.

They want to take the bipartisan Federal Election Commission, make it a partisan body, and give Democrats the majority. They want to send taxpayers' money to political campaigns. They want to expand Washington's policing of Americans' speech. They want to neuter voter ID and mandate ballot harvesting in all 50 States. Strangely enough, for multiple years now, this exact same power grab has been their answer to every changing circumstance. When they didn't like the outcome of the 2016 election, Democrats said our democracy was broken and only this takeover could fix it. Then, in 2020, they got the result they liked. Suddenly, this same bill became the way to simply preserve a system that functioned well.

There seems to be no situation where this attempted power grab is not the Democrats' answer. I think we can learn tomorrow that an asteroid was hurtling toward Earth, and Democrats would say our only hope was to pass H.R. 1.

This isn't about responding to recent State laws. It is not about justice or equity. Washington Democrats want to rewrite all 50 States' election laws. They want to take over the Federal Election Commission. And they have been trying out different justifications for multiple years straight to get what they want.

Any Federal law addressing the ground rules of our democracy has a special obligation to be sober, to be factual, and to be bipartisan. The Senate has done just that in the past. We have passed reasonable laws by huge, bipartisan margins making it easier to vote but harder to cheat.

So ask yourself: Why won't Democrats today deal in truth and facts? Why do they keep using the same smears to distract from their policies? Why are they hell-bent on a bill that passed the House with purely partisan support but bipartisan opposition? Talk about tipping your hand.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will pro-

ceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Gary Gensler, of Maryland, to be a Member of the Securities and Exchange Commission for the remainder of the term expiring June 5, 2021.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

MAIDEN SPEECH

Mr. MARSHALL. Mr. President, today I am honored to stand on this hallowed Senate floor and share my gratitude for and the priorities of the people of Kansas.

I want to start by thanking the people of Kansas who believed in me and sent me here to represent them. It is an honor of a lifetime to follow in the steps of heroic Kansans who preceded me in this legislative body. That includes sharing this tour of duty with my long-time friend whom I have admired for decades and now my senior Senator, JERRY MORAN, as well as legends of this Chamber, my mentors Bob Dole and Pat Roberts.

But before I continue, I want to say a special word of gratitude to my family for all of their support. I would not be here today without the support of my wife of 37 years now, Laina, our four children and their spouses, our three grandchildren, as well as my parents, brother, sister, and extended family, who in so many ways have contributed to our campaigns and the work we have done in Congress. I am grateful for their understanding, their unwavering support, and sacrifice of privacy and family time, but, mostly, I am grateful for the values they passed on to me.

I am grateful for the many teachers, coaches, pastors, and personal friends who inspired me and gave me a solid foundation of values that have seen us through tough times. These values provided the foundation for me, a fifth-generation farm kid, to become a first-generation college student and live my American dream as a physician in rural America.

And these values have become pillars, the sturdiest of which in my life are faith, family, community, education, and hard work—a faith that you live in your heart, not wear on your shirt sleeves; a family that loves and stands beside you no matter what; a community where everyone looks out for each other; an education that is the great equalizer, leveling the playing field for all; and, finally, a belief in hard work that paves the way to achieve your American dream.

As I traveled Kansas this past year, I carried these pillars with me while I heard from people all over the State, and they gave three very clear priorities: No. 1, provide for their safety, health, and security; No. 2, to bring back our jobs and economy; and, No. 3, to protect our values and our God-given, inalienable rights.

I am here in the Senate to do just that, to fight for the people of Kansas,